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Romancing in Pioneer Days

It is amazing how early the word "Hawkeye" became associated with Iowa maidens. Originally suggested as the nickname for Iowa by James G. Edwards in the *Fort Madison Patriot* on March 24, 1838, the *Quincy Whig* of July 25, 1840, quoted the *Chicago Democrat* as follows: "*Economy and Courting*: Nothing exceeds the modesty of the Hawkeye girls. They won't be courted by daylight, and not in the evening, unless the candles are extinguished."

Twenty years later, on April 13, 1860, the *Page County Herald* published a long poem that set forth the rules to be followed in courting a Clarinda girl.

Clarinda Sparking Rules

In modern times each gallant blade
Must understand the sparking trade,
As done by systematic rule
And taught in the Clarinda Sparking School.
For here the unpracticed youth is taught
To handle ladies as he ought;
To do the thing genteel and fine,
Exactly to the ladies' mind.
But I, unlettered in the art,
Was forced to act a neutral part;
At length, on further knowledge bent,

Straight to the sparking teacher went.
"Now, pray, dear sir, can you teach fools
The mystery of the sparking rules?"
The teacher cast a glance or two,
And seemed to think I'd spoken true,
And promised to do all he could
To make the matter understood.
So with a most portentous "hem!"
The following dialogue began:
"Now, sir," said he, "On Sunday eve
If there's a girl you wish to sleeve,
Be sure to scan the distance right—
Be there by early candle light.
Now try the old folks to amuse,
And tell them all the weekly news,"
"Oh, ho!" said I, "but it may be,
They'll think it's them I come to see."
"Fear not, my lad," the teacher said,
"For they'll soon patter off to bed.
Then buckle up and plant your chair
Beside your loved Dulcinia fair.
Be not too forward nor too slack,
But lay your arm across the back,
And in an easy, fluent style
Content to sit and talk awhile.
Now as to business, you proceed,
Of candle light there is no need.
And thus to do the matter slick
Turn top for bottom in the stick."
"Hold! hold!" says I, "why man, but hark!
Put out the light? 'Twould then be dark.
In such a case, how in the deuce
Could any fellow see to spruce?"
"Thou stupid mule!" the teacher cried,
"The thing has oft been fully tried;

And every skillful knowing lark
Says courting's better in the dark;
For nothing then can intervene
To mar the beauty of the scene.
Be sure you sit beside the miss,
And give the first, the sweetest kiss,
Till echo sends the echo back,
And makes the wall and ceiling crack,
Suiting the action with a squeeze,
If you the maid e'er wish to please."
"What! kiss a girl! And squeeze her too?
Why, bless me! that will never do.
'Twould be too bad, too high a strike—
Besides, I never did the like!
In short, to own the truth, I vow
I am afraid—and—don't know how!"
"So much the worse," he quick replied,
"A craven heart ne'er won a bride.
Don't fear 'twill be too bold a move,
For 'tis the very thing they love,
The more you hug and kiss and squeeze,
So much the better you will please.
Then hug and kiss with all your power,
Till quarter past the eleventh hour;
And then stop short, a respite take
For very human nature's sake;
Some pumpkin pie must then be brought,
No other kind will do, 'tis thought;
Likewise some milk to wash it down,
No better beverage can be found.
Now quiet eat—'twould be a joke
To kiss her now; perhaps you'd choke!"
"Right true," said I, "you've spoken well,
For who the consequence could tell.
Thy view with mine exactly chimes,

For I should choke at the best of times."
"No danger man," the teacher said—
"It's no choking job to kiss a maid,
Except you vary from the rule,
And kiss her when your mouth is full.
But of this parley there's no need;
So with the business let's proceed.
Of pumpkin pies you've had your fill;
As much of milk as you can swill;
So now go leisurely to work
And make no rash or hasty jerk.
Now lay all cambrous things aside,
And clear the course for action wide;
Take off the collar, 'tis no use
To care for looking fine and spruce,
Besides 'twould be a cruel shame
To crumple up and spoil the same.
Now set to work with might and main
To act the former part again.
And now the business course is run,
Till somewhere near the hour of one.
So then bring matters to a close,
And seek your home—you'll need repose."
"Yes, faith, I think I shall," says I,
"But can't I have more pumpkin pie?
I think it now would relish good,
Besides I should require some food
Exhausted nature to sustain,
And bring me back to life again."
"Oh, yes," says he, "tis not so bad,
Provided more may yet be had.
But let's proceed. The race is run
And all the sparking fairly done.
A few kind words to please the miss,
And then the last, that longest kiss.

Be all equipped—prepared to start;
 Then clasp the maiden to your heart—
 A lengthened press—a world of fuss,
 And then a half and two-thirds buss,
 No longer now you need to stay;
 Make your best bow and walk away;
 Before you go it won't be amiss
 To stop and have another kiss.
 Now bow again, and start to go,
 And walk, perhaps, a step or two,
 Then turn around and ask her plain
 If you may come to spark again.
 If she says 'yes,' as she will surely do,
 Then take another kiss or two;
 Then take her hand, so small and white,
 Another kiss, and say, 'Good night!' "

W. W. C.

Sparking in pioneer days was not without its dangers and difficulties. Young men did not always become enraptured with the girl next door, or down the road apiece to an adjoining farm. Sometimes, as in the case of two Dubuque youths, they crossed the mighty Mississippi to "keep company" with the objects of their affections in Dunleith, better known as East Dubuque. In the summertime this need not be too difficult, but in the winter the frozen Father of Waters presented some real hazards, as recorded in the *Dubuque Weekly Herald* of January 24, 1866.

Sparking and Ducking

"Sparking Sunday night" was formerly deemed a very harmless amusement for the indulgence of young people

just assuming the *toga virilis*, and passing from pantalettes to long skirts, and none of those ills popularly supposed to inevitably follow the wrong doing of maturer years were thought to attach to the pleasant fiction of "keeping company" thus indulged. But even this agreeable cultivation of the tender passion, and we can all attest that it is agreeable, or was, seems not to be exempt from the tribulations incident to other joys. The course of true love may have run smoothly in the case of two young bloods from this city, last Sunday night, but if at all like the the current of the Mississippi they are prepared to denounce it as most confoundedly frigid. It fell out and they fell in, in this wise: They are young and ambitious editions of embryo manhood, and sought feminine flowers, to use a metaphor, in the rural paths of Dunleith, not, perhaps, that they are more beautiful there than here, but "distance lends," &c. It was Sunday night and the time was propitious for such botanical explorations. The dangers of a tramp on treacherous ice but lent additional charm to the visit. The hours fled sweetly but too soon, and late they essayed a return. Having crossed the river to near Rhomberg's Distillery, (how horrible localities take the romance from a narrative) the ice gave way and down plunged one of the swains. A desperate struggle with the breaking ice and the tide and he regained firm footing. His companion sought to "pass over dry shod" by avoiding the pit into which his friend had fallen, but had proceeded only a short distance when down he went, completely submerged and only at last rescued by the greatest exertion on the part of the other. Drenched clothes on a January night are not comfortable, we presume, at least our young friends so testify, and as there seem to be possibilities in a visit to the fair daughters of Dunleith, we think we can name two youths who will hereafter be satisfied with the fair daughters of Dubuque.

If crossing the frozen Mississippi in the winter could prove hazardous to young Dubuquers, a long horseback ride into the country was not without its peril to a youthful Cedar County lad bent on visiting his loved one in her home. The editor of the *Oskaloosa Herald* of May 18, 1865, took an almost hilarious delight in recording the following incident for his readers.

The following circumstance happened in Cedar county, Iowa.

A certain young man being out on a courting expedition, came late on Sunday evening and, in order to keep the secret from his acquaintances, determined to be at home bright and early Monday morning.

Mounted on his horse, dressed in his white summer pants, and other things in proportion, he arrives at the residence of his inamorata, where he is kindly received and his horse promptly cared for—being turned into the pasture for the night. The night passed away, and three o'clock in the morning arrived. Three o'clock was the time for him to depart, so that he might arrive at home before his comrades would be stirring. He sallied forth to the pasture to catch his horse; but there was a difficulty—the grass was high and loaded with dew.—To venture forth with the white pants on would rather take the starch out and lead to his detection. It would not do to go in with his unmentionables, so he quickly made his resolve. He carefully disrobed himself of his valuable whites, and placed them safely on the fence, while he gave chase with unscreened pedals, through the wet grass after his horse.

Returning to the fence where he had safely suspended his lily white unmentionables, O, horrible dictu! what a sight met his eyes. The field into which his horse had

been turned was not only a horse pasture, but calf pasture too, and the naughty calves, attracted by the flag on the fence, had betaken themselves to it and calf like, had eaten them up, only a few well chewed fragments of this once valuable article of wardrobe now remained—only a few threads—just sufficient to indicate what they once had been! What a pickle this was for a nice young man to be in.

It was now daylight, and the farmers were out and our hero far from home, with no covering for his "traveling apparatur." It would not do to go back to the house of his lady love, neither could he go to town in that plight. There was only one source left to him, that was to secrete himself in the bushes until the next night and go home under cover of the darkness—Safely had he remained under the cover of the bushes for some time; and it may be imagined that his feelings towards the calf kind were not of the most friendly character; but ere long his seclusion was destined to be intruded upon. By and by the boys who had been out to feed the calves returned with the remnant of the identical white garment which adorned the lower limbs of their late visitor.

They were mangled and torn to threads! An inquest was immediately held over them. Some awful fate had befallen the young man. The neighbors were summoned to search for the mangled corpse, and the posse, with all speed set out with dogs and arms. The pasture was thoroughly scoured, and the adjacent thickets, when lo! our hero was driven from his lair by the keen scent of the dogs, all safe, alive and well—minus the linen.

An explanation ensued at the expense of our hero, but he was successful in the end and married the lady and is now living comfortably in one of the flourishing towns of Iowa.

Sometimes the best laid plans of lovers went strangely awry. In 1848 an Iowa City editor re-

vealed an unexpected shift in circumstances that left the willing and eager bride in her bedroom weeping while her own mother made off with her beloved and intended groom. Under the caption, "It Takes the Widders," the *Iowa Standard* of May 3 records:

It Takes The "Widders,"—Quite a mistake took place in a love affair at the North. A couple of young fools agreed to elope together, and by some mistake in the preliminary arrangements, the male lover put his ladder up to the window next to that in which her mamma, a handsome widow, reposed. She turned the mistake to her own advantage, got into his arms, returned his embraces, was borne by him to the carriage, and by preserving a becoming silence until daylight, kept him in error, and then by the potent power of her blandishments, actually charmed him into matrimony with herself.

The art of making love, whether by maidens or widows, appears to have been a well-cultivated practice in the Hawkeye State. Iowa papers were filled with advice and instructions to the lovelorn. Iowa editors either gave their own personal opinions on how to win a lover, or quoted the best suggestions of their fellow editors. On June 6, 1880, the *Boone County* (Boonesboro) *News* contained the following sound words of advice.

Hints to Young Ladies

Don't begin your crotchet work or embroidery unless you have first mended that hole in your stocking. No use crowding it under the heel of your shoe—rags, like murder, will out; and they speak with terrible loud voices and at inconvenient seasons, sometimes.

Don't undertake to write skim milk poetry when you feel a little disposed towards enthusiasm. Go and do a kind action, or speak an encouraging word to somebody, if the feelings must have vent. Depend upon it, you will be better satisfied afterward.

Don't pretend to be angry because gentlemen have the audacity to look at you, when you promenade the streets in your best bonnet. What do you go there for, if not to be seen? The more you affect indignation the more the offending wretches won't believe it.

Don't pay thirty or forty dollars for the aforesaid bonnet, then complain that "Pa" is in such narrow circumstances you can't afford to give twenty-five cents in charity!

Don't eat blue and yellow the whole time, like a mouse nibbling at a pineapple cheese, and then lament because you haven't any appetite for dinner.

Don't keep a gentleman waiting half an hour when he calls, while you put on lace and ribbons, and arrange curls; he isn't a fool, whatever you think on the subject, and will probably form an opinion of his own upon your original appearance.

Don't run and hide like a frightened rabbit, when a gentleman puts his head into the room where you are sweeping and dusting. If there is anything to be ashamed of in the business, why do you do it?

Don't proclaim to the world that you can't exist without six Paris bonnets in a year, and that life wo'd be a burden without an opera box and diamonds and then wonder that the young men "sheer off!"

And, above all, when some one does propose, don't say no, when you mean yes! He may take you at your word!

A Marengo editor presented the following words of advice in the *Iowa Valley Democrat* of December 4, 1861. The suggestions apparently

met the warm approval of other Iowa editors, judging by the number who copied it for the benefit of their young unmarried readers.

To Unmarried Ladies

The following items of advice to the ladies remaining in a state of single blessedness are extracted from the manuscript of an old dowager:

If you have blue eyes, languish.

If black eyes, affect spirit.

If you have pretty feet, wear short petticoats.

If you are the least doubtful as to that point, wear them long.

If you have good teeth don't forget to laugh now and then.

If you have bad ones, you must only simper.

While you are young, sit with your face to the light.

When you are a little advanced, sit with your back to the window.

If you have a bad voice, always speak in a low tone.

If it is acknowledged that you have a fine voice, never speak in a high tone.

If you dance well, dance seldom.

If you dance ill, never dance at all.

If you sing well, make no puerile excuses.

If you sing indifferently, hesitate not a moment when you are asked, for few persons are competent judges of singing, but every one is sensible of the desire to please.

If in conversation you think a person wrong, rather hint a difference of opinion than offer a contradiction.

It is always in your power to make a friend by smiles: what folly to make enemies by frowns.

When you have an opportunity to praise, do it with all your heart.

When you are forced to blame, do it with reluctance.

If you are envious of another woman never show it but by allowing her every good quality and perfection except those which she really possesses.

If you wish to let the world know you are in love with a particular man treat him with formality, and every one else with ease and freedom.

If you are disposed to be pettish or insolent, it is better to exercise your ill humor on your servant, than on your friend.

From the start, Iowa editors seemed to assume the role of advisor, defender, and protector of the gentler sex. Thus, on November 9, 1836, Judge John King printed the following in the *Du Buque Visitor*, the first newspaper published in Iowa.

A Bachelor's Idea of a Wife

A wife should have *nine* qualifications which begin with the letter P.—*Piety, Perseverance, Patience, Prudence, Patriotism, Politeness, Persuasion, Penetration, and portion.*—That which *should* be *first* of all, and *most* of all in consideration, which is *piety*, is now-a-day the *least* of all, the *last* of all, and with many *not at all.*—That which *should* be the *last* of all, and *least* of all in consideration, which is *portion*, is now become *first* of all, *most* of all, and with some *all in all!*

Although most Iowa newspaper editors were generous in the space allotted for advice to young people who were intent on marrying, a number seem to have carried an unusual amount of stories, suggestions and editorials on love—its joys and blessings, its pitfalls and its sorrows. The Estherville, Boonesboro, Council Bluffs, Iowa City, and

Dubuque editors were among the most liberal in offering free advice. On December 30, 1868, the *Northern Vindicator* (Estherville), printed the following rules for young ladies.

How to Avoid a Bad Husband

The following rules will teach young ladies how to avoid the catching of a bad husband:

1. Never marry for wealth.—A woman's life consists not in those things that she possesseth.

2. Never marry a fop, or one who struts dandy-like in kid gloves, cane, and rings on his fingers. Beware, there is a trap!

3. Never marry a niggard or close-fisted mean, sordid man, who saves every penny, or spends it grudgingly. Take care, lest he stint you to death.

4. Never marry a stranger, or one whose character is not known or tested. Some women jump right into the fire with their eyes wide open.

5. Never marry a mope or drone, or one who drawls, and draggles through life, one foot after another and lets things take their chances.

6. Never marry a man who treats his mother or sister unkindly or indifferently. Such treatment is a sure indication of meanness and wickedness.

7. Never, on any account, marry a gambler, a profane person, one who in the least speaks light of God or of religion. Such a man can never make a good husband.

8. Never marry a sloven man who is negligent of his person, or dress, and is filthy in his habits. The external appearance is an index of the heart.

9. Shun the rake as a snake, a viper, a very demon.

10. Finally, never marry a man who is addicted to the use of ardent spirits. Depend upon it you are better off alone than you would be were you tied to a man whose

breath is polluted and whose vitals are being gnawed out by alcohol.

That there was need to observe such rules can be aptly demonstrated by the following incident recorded in the *Oskaloosa Herald* and reprinted in the *Boone County (Boonesboro) News* of May 25, 1859.

A Heroic Woman.—A New Way To Cure A Drunken Husband.—Mr. — of this place, a man with a wife and a family of children, indulged in his first drunken spree one day last week. He went home staggering under the influence of strong drink. His wife, a cool-minded woman, who had seen the havoc and the wretchedness, the poverty and misery occasioned in other families by drunkenness, took a novel method to correct her husband, and to impress him indelibly with the truth that "the way of the transgressor is hard." When he had sulked away to his room to sleep off the influence of liquor, she provided herself with a good "gad," such as Pike's Peakers are wont to urge forward their lazy oxen with, and going into his room proceeded to give him a most thorough and vigorous thrashing. The drunken, drowsy husband begged his loving wife to remember that this was his first offense and that she ought to treat him mercifully. She replied, that she knew it was his first drunken spree, and that she meant it should be his last, and thereupon increased the vigor of the blows already well laid on.

The husband, smarting under his chastisement but afraid or unable to make any other than a verbal remonstrance, then told his wife that he had been persuaded to drink by some friend and that he didn't intend to get drunk. She told him in reply, that if he hadn't any more sense than to drink just because he was asked, he deserved a good thrashing, and continued to lay on the

blows thick and fast. A neighbor hearing the disturbance came in to see what the trouble was. The heroic woman very calmly came out of the room and informed the neighbor that her husband was drunk and that she was whipping him for it, and that she thought she understood her own business. She then went back and gave her now subdued and penitent husband another round with the gad, and made him solemnly promise that he would never drink again.

These are literal facts, and the names of the parties would be given were it not thought best to withhold them from the public. The castigation which the man received will doubtless do him a great deal of good. If he ever gets drunk again he deserves to be flogged still more severely. The courage, the determination, and the physical force required on the part of the wife for such a temperance reformation as this, may not accord altogether with our notions of womanly refinement and delicacy, but the end justifies the means, and the man who has no more respect and regard for his wife than to go staggering into her presence deserves to be soundly thrashed by her, as often as he commits so great a wrong. It may be disgraceful to be whipped by a woman, but it is infinitely more disgraceful to be a habitual drunkard, to abuse one's family, and to bequeath to them a dishonored name. Under all the circumstances, Mrs. — did a creditable deed, and there are hundreds of noble, suffering women who are cursed with drunken husbands, to whom it might be said, in good faith, and sober earnestness, "go thou and do likewise." *Oskaloosa Herald.*

Not many women would have had the courage to punish their husbands as did the Oskaloosa heroine. Then as now, physical abuse was more likely to be meted out by the male inebriate from

whom the romance of earlier days had departed. One difference did exist in the period under survey. Newspapers, as has been shown, would have been far more sympathetic to the woman than they would today. The Sons of Temperance counted a large membership in the Territory of Iowa. During the 1850's the need for temperance had become so deeply ingrained in the hearts of Iowans that in the decades that followed, Iowa was destined to adopt almost every form of liquor control before it joined the majority of states that finally led to passage of the Volstead Act and National Prohibition.